



San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria announced Comic-Con is staying in San Diego through 2030. He was alongside officials from the San Diego Tourism Authority, Comic-Con International and the San Diego Convention Center. Photo by Gloria/Instagram

Seattle Designates Hotel Worker Day Amidst Local and National Labor Disputes

By Jordan Bradley

The Seattle City Council declared July 21 as Hotel Worker Day, highlighting their contribution to the infrastructure that welcomes guests to the Emerald City.

Council member Dionne Foster sponsored the proclamation and introduced it in the July 21 city council meeting, noting that she was excited to bring it forth.

"I want to share why that's so important to us," Foster said in the July 21 council meeting. "We know that – and I'm looking at you all – we know that the workers who are in our hotels are the folks who make fantastic places for us to stay, they make welcoming places for our guests, they help make Seattle a place that can welcome people to visit our fantastic city. We also know that those workers are, many times, immigrants, or, many times, folks who are working a couple of jobs to make sure that they can have affordability here. We wanted to have a moment to acknowledge the work that our hotel workers do to make Seattle such a

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Comic-Con Remaining in San Diego Through 2030

By Todd McElwee

Comic-Con is staying in San Diego through 2030.

An economic driver, cultural institution and source of local pride, the San Diego Tourism Authority (SDTA) said on July 22 that Comic-Con 2026 was expected to attract more than 135,000 attendees during its four-day run, following Preview Night on July 22. It is projected to generate more than \$160 million in regional economic

impact through direct and indirect visitor spending.

"Over the next few days, San Diego will once again find itself at the center of the entertainment and pop culture world," said Daniel Kuperschmid, President & CEO of SDTA, on July 22. "While attendees come here for Comic-Con, the experience extends far beyond the Convention Center. Fans, creators, studios and media are filling our hotels and restaurants, exploring our arts and cultural institutions and

attractions, and taking part in activations and special experiences across the city. That energy creates tremendous exposure for San Diego, and the agreement to keep Comic-Con in our destination through 2030 ensures those benefits for our visitor economy will continue for years to come."

San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria made the announcement at the show alongside officials from SDTA, Comic-Con International and the San Diego

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ILHA Announces 2026 Keynote Speakers, Dates for Annual Conference

By Jordan Bradley

The International Luxury Hotel Association (ILHA) will host its annual INSPIRE conference on December 15-16 at the JW Marriott Bonnet Creek Resort & Spa in Orlando.

The association also announced that Tina Edmundson, president of luxury at Marriott International, and Carolyn Doyon, president and CEO of Club

Med North America & Caribbean will be the keynote speakers at this year's event.

The 2026 INSPIRE conference convenes investors, developers, owners and operators in global luxury hospitality to discuss trends in investment and development, AI and technology, wellness and longevity, brand extension, sustainability, food and beverage strategy, marketing,

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Scene at Destinations International Annual Convention

Conversation with Glenn Rudolph, Director of Destinations Policy, Destinations International

In June, Destinations International (DI) announced Glenn Rudolph as the association's first Director of Destinations Policy, a senior-level position within DI's Advocacy and Research department. The Director of Destinations Policy is tasked with strengthening the association's role as a global leader in policy analysis, advocacy readi-

ness and public-sector intelligence for destination organizations. Rudolph has 25+ years of global experience in diplomacy, intelligence and policy analysis through service with the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of State and the U.S. Navy. USAE caught up with him prior to the Annual Convention and

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USAEExchange

Glenn Rudolph

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asked about his new role and the value it offers to DI's membership.

USAE: What most appealed to you about this opportunity with Destinations International?

Rudolph: Destinations International (DI) offers a fantastic opportunity to bring my years of experience with policy and analysis as well as relationship building and combine it with my love of travel and interest in engaging with and learning more about different communities across the United States, Canada and the rest of the world. The warm welcome and energy I witnessed during my interview rounds made it clear that this was the place where I wanted to begin this new chapter of my life. In full transparency, DI wasn't a place I imagined landing when I left government in early 2025. Like many colleagues leaving the diplomacy and intelligence fields, I assumed I'd end up at a defense or intelligence contractor or startup, and I spent months pursuing exactly that path. It was a tough season in a crowded D.C. job market, and somewhere along the way I realized it was time to consider paths I hadn't originally set out to explore. When I came across this role, something clicked—it was a chance to apply everything I'd built in policy and intelligence work toward something I was genuinely curious about and had never let myself consider. Taking that leap outside my comfort zone turned out to be the perfect silver lining, and I'm grateful DI saw the fit before I fully did.

USAE: What in your background makes you particularly suited to this role?

Rudolph: I bring more than 25 years of experience with intelligence, diplomacy and political and economic analysis to my current role. While most of my experience centers on the Middle East and international security issues, I am confident I can apply the same skills to provide DI and its

members with tactical intelligence and translate complex policy risks into clear, actionable strategies that allow our members and their communities to thrive.

USAE: What kind of challenges do destinations face that your products can help them meet?

Rudolph: Destination organizations are increasingly navigating funding threats, governance scrutiny and structural changes driven by fast-moving legislative and regulatory activity across the United States, Canada and international markets. Many destination organizations lack the internal capacity to monitor these developments in real time or translate them into action, especially during multi-jurisdictional or crisis situations. DI's policy and advocacy resources close that gap by delivering timely intelligence, briefings and practical tools so that members are able to respond with clarity and confidence rather than react under pressure.

USAE: What do you hope to broadly accomplish in this area within the next year or two?

Rudolph: Over the next year or two, my goal is to build a comprehensive Destination Policy Response Framework for DI, alongside a continuous monitoring and intelligence system that gives members reliable, ongoing visibility into the issues affecting their funding and operations. This includes supporting multi-jurisdictional policy efforts; strengthening relationships with partner associations at the local, state/provincial and national level; and growing a resource library of case studies and response templates that raise the baseline policy preparedness across our membership.

USAE: What should destination organizations do to take advantage of your Destination Policy offerings?

Rudolph: Destination organizations should engage early and proactively. We hope they will engage us early on as their primary point of contact for urgent policy or governance issues rather than waiting until a crisis is



underway. Staying connected through DI briefings, webinars and educational sessions, as well as actively using the policy tools, templates and case study

library, will help destination leaders and boards translate national and international policy trends into locally relevant action.

Caesars Entertainment Contributed \$87.8 Million in 2025 CSR Efforts

By Todd McElwee

Caesars Entertainment's 2025 Corporate Social Responsibility Report showed \$87.8 million in community investment and continued progress across its PEOPLE PLANET PLAY strategy.

"At Caesars, doing business the right way means creating value for our Team Members, our guests, our communities and our shareholders," said Kiersten Flint, SVP of Corporate Social Responsibility and Internal Communications at Caesars Entertainment. "In 2025, we continued to invest in our people, strengthen our communities, operate with discipline and advance our PEOPLE PLANET PLAY strategy in ways that support long-term growth and resilience."

Caesars Entertainment said "PEOPLE PLANET PLAY" remains the foundation of its CSR strategy, guiding how it delivers value to stakeholders, mitigates risk and drives long-term resilience.

CSR Report Highlights Include:

People

- Caesars' community investment included nearly \$3.6 million donated to national and local non-profit organizations from the Caesars Foundation,

the monetary value of 78,000 volunteer hours through the Company's HERO volunteer program and \$2.6 million contributed by Caesars Entertainment guests through the Caesars Makes Change initiative.

- Caesars invested \$35 million in training and development in 2025, supporting more than 1.5 million hours of learning and helping Team Members build long-term careers across the enterprise.

- Caesars filled more than 7,700 roles internally in 2025, including 5,500 promotions, reflecting what it called a strong commitment to career growth and advancement from within.

Planet

- Caesars Entertainment achieved a 21% reduction in Scope 1 & 2 emissions against a 2019 base year and a 26% reduction in Scope 3 emissions against a 2022 base year.

- Caesars expanded its renewable energy efforts through a long-term partnership with Estuary Power. Through this agreement, Caesars will source more than 65,000 MWh of clean energy annually, building on existing solar investments and reinforcing its commitment to reducing its environmental footprint.

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HOTS

HOTS Giant Nutcracker ... A small midwestern town now boasts the largest nutcracker in the world. According to the Associated Press, the town of Luverne, Minnesota, is the proud hometown of an almost 66-foot tall nutcracker dressed like Uncle Sam. The town held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the statue (which does, in fact, have a working jaw) on July 18, the outlet reported, to officially welcome Verne the Patriot, as he has been dubbed. Verne is stationed outside the Those Blasted Things rock shop, which Katie Walgrave runs with her family. She told AP that since the nutcracker was completed in mid-June customers

at the rock shop have quadrupled, and local businesses have reported increased traffic as well. “Our goal is to have something that’s different and that you won’t see anywhere else. And so that’s what we have here,” she told AP. The Guinness World Records currently ranked a 33-foot-tall nutcracker in Neuhausen, Germany, as the tallest in the world, but Verne is double that. HOTS imagines it’s only a matter of time before there’s a new record holder in town.

✧ ✧ ✧ ✧ ✧

HOTS Lumberjack Champs ... At the Lumberjack World Championships competition held in Hayward, Wisconsin, three new women’s world records were made. The three-day competition concluded on July 18 and saw 66 men and 40 women compete in high-powered sawing, chopping, logrolling, and speed climbing events, the Associated Press reports. The event in small town Wisconsin gathers competitors from around the globe. Karolina Urbanová, hailing from the Czech Republic, set two world records

at the event, AP reports, taking first place in both the Women’s Underhand Chop and the Women’s Standing Chop. She set a new record in each, completing the events in 21.28 seconds and 19.38 seconds respectively. Meredith Ingbretonson of Hayward set the world record for the Women’s Boom Run – which requires competitors to run across water and back over eight cedar logs – in 13.78 seconds. HOTS would bet any runner ups with axes to grind will be ready for next year.

Events DC Helping to Bring USWNT vs. Spain
Match to Nation’s Capital
“Clash of Champions” set for October 10

By Todd McElwee

Next summer, the United States Women’s National Team (USWNT) could meet Spain in Brazil for the FIFA Women’s World Cup championship.

This fall, the reigning Olympic champion will welcome the world’s top-ranked women’s soccer team and defending Women’s World Cup champion to Washington, DC’s Audi Field on October 10 in a match branded as the “Clash of Champions.”

Continuing to be a champion of soccer, Events DC is helping bring the match to the District.

“As the official convention and sports authority of Washington, DC, Events DC plays a pivotal role in securing and executing world-class sporting events in the District,” an Events DC spokesperson told *USAE*. “For the U.S. Women’s National Team’s match with Spain, we’re working closely with local partners to coordinate essential logistics, including high-quality hotel accommodations, training facilities, and ancillary event spaces.”

An Events DC spokesperson added that Events DC is a proud partner of the NWSL’s Washington Spirit and



USWNT and Washington Spirit forward Trinity Rodman. Photo by Events DC

MLS’s D.C. United, and the organization leverages its partnership to host the Events DC Club at Audi Field, “providing a premier environment” for fans to support both clubs. The Spirit features several players from the U.S. Women’s National Team.

“Washington, DC is the Sports Capital,” an Events DC spokesperson told *USAE*. “Soccer is a global sport that serves as a powerful bridge between our city’s diverse communities. Hosting top-tier sporting events allows us to showcase Washington, DC as a world-class, family friendly destination on the global stage. Beyond the

cultural significance, these high-profile events generate a substantial economic impact for the city by driving tourism, supporting local businesses, and creating jobs. Events DC is deeply committed to the growth of women’s sports, and we are thrilled to host this match on October 10, followed by the National Women’s Soccer League Championship on November 11.”

This match will be the fourth that the USWNT has played at Audi Field. The four-time World Cup winner most recently played at the venue last July, defeating Canada 3-0. The USWNT has played in Washington, DC 13 times, with the first 10 occurring at the RFK Stadium.

Spain and the U.S. teams will also play on October 13 at Subaru Park in Chester, Pennsylvania.

“Two more fantastic matches,” said USWNT head coach Emma Hayes. “We’ve desperately wanted to get Spain on our schedule, but the difficulties of scheduling the top teams during the women’s international calendar are well known, so to be able to get these two games on the East Coast will be the perfect tests before we head into World Cup qualifying at the end of the year.”

Caesars

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• Caesars expanded electric vehicle infrastructure across the enterprise in 2025, including the conversion of the in-house fleet at Caesars Palace to fully electric vehicles.

Play

• Caesars highlighted major capital investments in 2025 across its portfolio, including the beginning of Phase Two of the \$200 million Caesars Republic Lake Tahoe transformation and the beginning of more than \$100 million in Flamingo Las Vegas enhancements

• In 2025, Caesars marked 36 years of Responsible Gaming, delivering nearly 15,000 hours of training to more than 44,000 Team Members while strengthening guest education, awareness and access to support across its destinations and digital platforms.

• Caesars continued to strengthen responsible business operations in 2025 through its focus on ethical conduct, cybersecurity, data privacy, compliance and anti-money laundering, helping protect guests, Team Members and the business while reinforcing trust across the enterprise.

WEEKLY NEWS
OF ASSOCIATIONS
CVBs AND
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NEWS

Fairmont DC Announces 15th Annual Sustainability Fair

By Jordan Bradley

The Fairmont Washington, D.C., Georgetown luxury hotel is set to host its 15th annual Sustainability Fair on September 11.

The event gathers DC-based organizations doing work in the sustainability sector and highlights local initiatives, and is held in the hotel's Colonnade Room.

The annual event celebrates "all things local by promoting agriculture, education, and community involvement through quality entertainment in a family-friendly environment," Fairmont said.

The event is free and open to the public. Around 30 local participants will be on site, including organizations like Alexandria Land Rover, DC Beekeepers, DC Department of Energy and Environment, DC Sustainable Energy Utility, Foggy Bottom West End Mainstreet, Horton's Kids, Keany Produce, Lucky Dog Animal Rescue, Metropolitan Police Department, U.S. Green Building Council, World Wildlife Fund and Zero Waste in DC.

"Fairmont Washington, D.C.,

Georgetown is committed to protecting the environment," said Mark Huntley, General Manager and Regional Vice President at Fairmont. "Our Sustainability Committee develops initiatives that incorporate the principles of reduce, reuse and recycle into the hotel's daily operations. Our annual Sustainability Fair brings together many Washington, DC-based organizations that share our commitment to environmental stewardship, providing an opportunity to educate, inspire, and encourage sustainable practices throughout our community."

The hotel welcomed around 105,000 Italian honeybees in four beehives onto the Fairmont's rooftop in May 2009, Fairmont told *USAE*. The initiative was established in response to a nationwide honeybee shortage as part of the hotel's environmental stewardship program.

According to Fairmont, "the bees enhance the hotel's culinary program along with its interior courtyard garden that already provides fresh herbs and flowers such as edible pansies, and the plants, trees and flowers in the surrounding Georgetown neigh-



The Fairmont Washington D.C., Georgetown keeps four beehives housing more than 105,000 Italian honeybees on the hotel's roof as part of its environmental stewardship program.

borhood."

Beekeepers collect around 150 pounds of honey for the Fairmont hives each year, which is then used in soups, salad dressings, pastries, ice creams "and other culinary delights" at the Fairmont D.C.'s Juniper restaurant, hotel representatives said. Honey-

comb from the hives is also used in the Juniper's BeeTini.

Representatives from the Fairmont hotel's environmental program will be on site to share samples of honey from the hotel's honeybee hives.

To find out more or to register to attend, click [here](#).

Seattle Labor

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fantastic city, and to proclaim Hotel Worker Day in celebration of their work and their organizing, and their steadfast contributions to our city."

In a statement with Seattle's local Unite Here union, Foster said that while the proclamation was a good first step, it also needed to "be matched with action."

Workers at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Seattle Downtown Pioneer Square – which is a short walk from Seattle's Lumen Field – and members of Unite Here Local 8 have been on strike since June 18.

"A city's values are revealed by how it treats the people whose work is too often invisible. Every clean hotel room, every warm welcome, every visitor who leaves Seattle with a positive impression is possible because hotel workers show up with care, professionalism, and pride," Foster said.

The union has gone so far as to create a [website](#) that populates reviews about the hotel from Expedia, TripAdvisor, Yelp and Google. As of July 23, the website had close to 30 negative reviews with several specifically mentioning the strike. Several reviewers also noted that the Embassy Suites hotel had not notified them of disrupted services and strike action outside the hotel in advance of their stay.

Hilton is squarely in the crosshairs of Unite Here, with the union making a July 20 labor dispute alert on the company's Graduate Hotels brand.

The union "issued a travel advisory" for guests of the brand "amid potential labor disputes," it said, calling out the Graduate Hotels by Hilton brand, the brand's owner, AJ Capital Partners, and "preferred operator" Schulte Hospitality Group.

Unite Here's travel advisory notes that the Graduate New York on the campus of Cornell Tech, a graduate campus and research center of Cornell University, closed "abruptly" in November last year.

However, reports indicate that while the hotel is owned by AJ Capital affiliate Graduate Roosevelt Island Owner LLC, it is unclear whether the hotel had been operated by Schulte Hospitality at the time of its closure.

The Graduate New York has remained closed and owner Graduate Roosevelt Island LLC is currently in an exchange of lawsuits. Cornell University filed a suit against the hotels' operator in early April alleging the Graduate defaulted on its lease by shutting the hotel down. The univer-

sity also alleges the hotel owes more than \$50,000 in unpaid utilities. The AJ Capital Partners affiliate pushed back with its own lawsuit filed April 30 asserting that it had "acted in full compliance with the Lease."

Meanwhile, an affiliate of lender ACRES Capital is seeking to recoup more than \$79 million in loans from AJ Capital.

"AJ Capital shut down the only hotel on Roosevelt Island, turned Union employees out of work, walked away from its obligations to Cornell University, and attempted to leave its lender holding the bag on almost \$80 million," said William Brewer, lead counsel

for ACRES and partner at Brewer, Attorneys & Counselors.

Neither AJ Capital nor Schulte returned *USAE* request for comment by press deadline.

At the Graduate by Hilton Palo Alto near Stanford University, Unite Here said, non-managerial staff were fired "with no notice" around April 14, but the hotel is still operating.

According to the *San Jose Spotlight*, management at the hotel – which is owned by AJ Capital – told some of

the workers that had been fired that the hotel's ground floor restaurant was planning to shut down. However, staff later discovered that the restaurant was still open and operating with temporary contract workers.

"They told us a few different things about what was happening, but none of those things were, 'We're going to keep operating as normal with a full staff of temp workers who don't have benefits, and we're getting rid of all of these stable jobs in this community,'" said Helen Cane, a former waitress at the Graduate who was among those laid off, in an interview with the *Spotlight*.

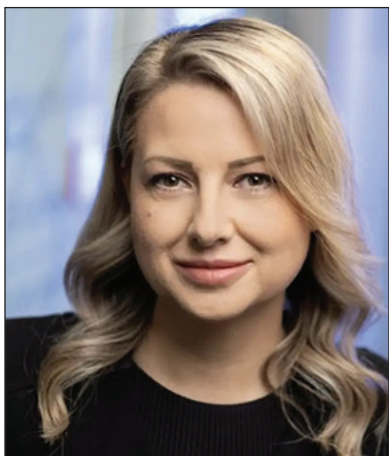
The hotel let go of kitchen staff, housekeepers, servers, engineers and other non-managerial positions, Cane told the outlet.

Hilton is currently focusing on a brand expansion for its Graduate hotels, according to a June 1 release, and a historic hotel in Boulder, Colorado, is expected to join the portfolio in the coming months. AJ Capital Partners last March became the Hotel Boulderado's majority owner and the property is currently undergoing a phased renovation to prepare to open under the Graduate by Hilton portfolio.

However, workers at the Hotel Boulderado are in the process of demanding "a fair process to decide on a union," Unite Here said, and are reporting staff shortages, heavy workloads and stagnant wages.

Unite Here's travel advisory notes that the Graduate New York on the campus of Cornell Tech, a graduate campus and research center of Cornell University, closed "abruptly" in November last year.

Industry Movers



Meaghan Ferrigno has been appointed Interim President & CEO of Destination Canada, effective July 1. She is CFO and Chief Data & Analytics Officer. Marsha Walden, who was President & CEO, has retired from Destination Canada. Ferrigno has also worked for Pacific Blue Cross. She earned her degree from Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. She has also studied at Northwestern University, Cornell University and MIT.



Ragini Pillay Clark has been appointed Evermore Orlando Resort's Director of Global Leisure Sales & Marketing. A hospitality executive with more than 25 years of experience in sales, marketing and business development, Pillay Clark joins Evermore following a 17-year career with Hilton. Most recently, she served as director of leisure sales for Waldorf Astoria Orlando and Signia by Hilton Orlando, where she led strategic leisure sales initiatives.



Jamal Massengale is now General Manager of the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel & Suites Jersey City. He has more than 20 years of hospitality experience, including 12 years with Hilton. Most recently, he was general manager of Embassy Suites by Hilton Parsippany. He was the director of operations at DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Hotel Boston-Cambridge and assistant director of food and beverage at New York Hilton Midtown.



Eric Ashford has been promoted to Hotel Manager of The Westin Nashville. Ashford steps into the role after nearly a decade with The Westin Nashville, where he most recently served as the director of operations. The property has recently undergone a \$13.5 million renovation. He has more than 20 years of hospitality experience spanning Texas, New York and Tennessee. In this role, he will oversee hotel operations.

[See more Industry Movers](#)

Comic-Con

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Convention Center (SDCC).

"Comic-Con belongs in San Diego, and today's announcement ensures this incredible tradition will continue here through 2030," said Gloria. "This agreement is the result of years of partnership and reflects our shared commitment to the fans, creators, businesses and workers who make Comic-Con unlike anything else in the world. We're proud to welcome everyone back to San Diego for another unforgettable year and excited about the future we're building together."

North of 61,000 hotel room nights were expected to be booked during Comic-Con, with visitors projected to spend more than \$95 million at local hotels, restaurants, attractions and businesses. Comic-Con is also projected to generate approximately \$3 million in hotel and sales tax revenue for the City of San Diego, helping fund neighborhood services.

"We are both excited and thrilled to remain in San Diego through 2030," said David Glanzer, Chief Communications and Strategy Officer of

Comic-Con. "We are grateful to the City, Tourism Authority and the many hotels who have joined in offering increased room blocks at competitive rates that can keep tens of thousands of fans returning to Comic-Con in San Diego for years to come."

Comic-Con is the largest comic book and popular arts convention of its kind in the world, featuring more than 460,000 square feet of exhibit space, more than 1,000 exhibitors, and over 2,000 hours of programming, workshops and special events celebrating comics, film, television, gaming, publishing and the arts.

Mardeen Mattix, President and CEO, SDCC, said: "With its global reach and audience, Comic-Con has become an enduring part of our city's identity. Each year, Comic-Con draws worldwide attention to San Diego, supports thousands of jobs, drives business throughout the region, and generates millions of dollars in hotel and sales tax revenue that fund essential City services for San Diegans. Tourism powers San Diego, and Comic-Con's decision to stay in San Diego through 2030 is a significant win for our economy and our community."

Destinations International Accredits Thirty-Three Destinations Under DMAP

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) has announced that nine destination organizations have received Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) accreditation "in recognition of their commitment to industry excellence and meeting the industry standard for performance and accountability of destination marketing organizations around the world."

"We are pleased to welcome these destination organizations to the distinguished DMAP community," said Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI. "DMAP accreditation reflects a strong commitment to organizational excellence, accountability and service to the communities these organizations represent. We are grateful to the DMAP Board for its leadership and continued stewardship of this important industry program."

An additional 24 destination organizations received reaccreditation. The announcement was made on July 22 at the DI Annual Convention in Portland, Oregon.

Several organizations achieved accreditation with distinction, an honor reserved for those destination organizations that go beyond meeting the required standards of accreditation to truly showcase the breadth of their

operation and their commitment to advancing the destination they serve.

"Achieving DMAP accreditation demonstrates that a destination organization meets the highest standards of professional practice," said Patrick Kaler, President & CEO of Visit Buffalo and Chair of the DMAP Board. "It provides stakeholders with confidence that the organization has the leadership, systems and expertise required to strengthen the visitor economy and create lasting value for visitors and residents alike."

The following accreditations and re-accreditations were announced:

Newly Accredited Organizations

- Florida's Sports Coast / Pasco County, FL
- Tourism Kingston
- Visit Beaufort, Port Royal and Sea Islands
- Visit Charlotte/CRVA
- Visit College Station
- Visit Overland Park
- Play Qiddiya City*
- Punta Gorda / Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau*
- Visit Florida Keys*

Reaccredited Organizations

Stay Connected



@USAEnews

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NEWS

Destinations International & Destinations International Foundation Announce New Board Members and Officers

By Jonathan Trager

Destinations International (DI) has announced its association Board of Directors and Foundation Board of Trustees for 2026–2027.

Kyle Edmiston, CDME, President & CEO, Visit Lake Charles, assumed the role of Chair of Destinations International. Steven Paganelli, CDME, Sr. Director, Americas Sales, Tripadvisor, assumed the role of Chair of the DI Foundation. Elections were held at the association's annual business meeting during the organization's 2026 Annual Convention in Portland, Oregon.

"Destinations International and the Destinations International Foundation are strengthened by the exceptional volunteer leaders who

serve on our boards and committees," said Don Welsh, President & CEO of DI. "Their expertise, vision and commitment shape the future of our association and the destination organization profession worldwide. We are deeply grateful for the time, counsel and leadership each of these individuals contributes in service to our industry, and we are pleased to welcome our newest directors and trustees. We look forward to the year ahead under the leadership of two outstanding board chairs whose experience and dedication will advance our mission and support our global membership."

"Destinations International plays a vital role in advancing destination organizations around the world through the advocacy, tools and resources, re-

search and professional development our members rely on to strengthen their communities," said Edmiston. I look forward to working alongside my fellow board members and the outstanding team at Destinations International to build on the organization's strong momentum, expand its global impact and support our members as they navigate new opportunities and challenges. I am grateful to Leslie Bruce, CDME, President & CEO of Banff & Lake Louise Tourism Bureau, for her exceptional leadership over the past year and thank her for the lasting contributions she has made to our association and industry."

Steven Paganelli, CDME, VP, Global Media & Partnerships, as the following: "The foundation is pivotal to advancing the destination organization

profession by investing in research, advocacy, workforce development and initiatives that strengthen communities around the world. I look forward to working with my fellow trustees and the Destinations International team to continue expanding the foundation's impact and ensure it provides the resources and support our members need to succeed in a rapidly evolving industry. I am grateful to Martha J. Sheridan, President & CEO of Meet Boston, for her outstanding leadership and dedication over the past year and thank her for all she has done to advance the foundation and our industry."

Find a complete list of association board members [here](#). Find a complete list of foundation board members [here](#).

ILHA

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workforce and talent, and guest experiences.

"INSPIRE isn't just about who's in the room. It's about the questions we ask each other while we're there," said Barak Hirschowitz, President of ILHA. "We've built an agenda with the right people and the right information, but the real value comes from the debate and discussion that happens across every touchpoint of the event. Our goal is that every attendee leaves with what they need to make 2027 their strongest year yet."

Marriott has a portfolio of more than 545 luxury hotels in 74 countries. Edmundson – who has been with Marriott since 2008 – said that today's luxury traveler is heavily focused on

curation. – both in their day-to-day lives and while away.

"Luxury travelers have become extraordinary curators of their own lives. They aren't looking to simply visit the world's most captivating places – they want to feel connected to them, to the people behind them, to stories that can't be found in a guidebook, and to craft their own stories," said Edmundson. "Our role is to create experiences that are as emotionally resonant as they are exceptional. That's why conversations like those at ILHA INSPIRE are so important. They challenge us to think beyond today's expectations, exchange ideas across the industry, and collectively shape the future of luxury hospitality in ways that are more meaningful, more personal, and ultimately more enduring."

Club Med originated as a pioneer

of the all-inclusive vacation and was founded on Spain's Mallorca island in 1950. In recent years, the brand has repositioned itself as luxury resorts. Doyon echoed a similar sentiment to Edmundson, adding that connection and discovery are key desires for luxury travelers today.

"Luxury today is a feeling more than it is a product. Travelers now are craving a true vacation from the day-to-day, not just a change of scenery. They want to unplug, reconnect with one another, and rediscover what actually makes them happy," said Doyon. "Club Med has spent years claiming its place in the premium space by protecting exactly that, the connection, spontaneity, and simple fun people are missing most. I'm excited to join fellow leaders at INSPIRE to discuss how our industry can keep creating

experiences that are more meaningful, more intentional, and deeply relevant to today's traveler."

A full agenda of sessions and speakers will be released in the coming months, ILHA said.

To find out more or to register, click [here](#).

DMA

continued from page 5

- Cobb Travel & Tourism
- Elkhart County CVB
- Fort Myers - Islands, Beaches and Neighborhoods
- Heritage Corridor Destinations
- Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission
- Meet Chicago Northwest
- New Orleans & Company
- Richmond Region Tourism
- Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island
- Visit Boulder, the Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Visit Cincy
- Visit Dublin Ohio
- Visit Gainesville, Alachua County
- Visit Milwaukee
- Visit Shreveport-Bossier
- Destination Dutchess
- St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and The Beaches Visitors & Convention Bureau
- Banff & Lake Louise Tourism*
- Destination Augusta*
- Discover Saskatoon*
- Parksville Qualicum Beach Tourism Association*
- Visit Anchorage*
- Visit Greensboro*
- Visit Wichita*

*DMA with Distinction

Find more information about DMA [here](#).



Destinations International honored the 2026 class of 30 Under 30 honorees at its Recognition Celebration on July 21 during the association's Annual Convention in Portland, Oregon.

Scene at Destinations International Annual Convention



NEWS

HSMAI Opens Entry Period for 70th Annual Adrian Awards

By Jordan Bradley

The Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) announced the opening of its 2026 Adrian Awards nominations on July 15.

The awards competition highlights successful campaigns, brands, agencies and hospitality sales and marketing professionals advancing their organization's strategic vision with creative and innovative campaigns, HSMAI said.

The association is hosting the awards ceremony for the 70th year in 2026. Submissions must be sent by

September 15.

"The Adrian Awards have commemorated the very best in hospitality and travel marketing for 70 years, celebrating the ideas, campaigns, and people who continue to move our industry forward," said Brian Hicks, President and CEO of HSMAI. "As we mark this milestone anniversary, we're proud to honor both the remarkable legacy of the Adrian Awards and the innovative work that will define the next generation of travel marketing. We look forward to celebrating another exceptional class of winners."

In recent years, HSMAI revamped

the awards categories for the Adrians, expanding them to encompass 34 categories "spanning advertising, public relations, integrated marketing, digital innovation, social media, experiential campaigns and more," HSMAI said. New categories now include AI-powered marketing campaigns, creator and influencer marketing and social media engagement.

The awards also recognize the best campaigns for airlines, attractions, cruise, destination management organizations, hotels and resorts, restaurants, and short-term rentals; and a special award will be present-

ed in partnership with Destinations International recognizing the best in advocacy leadership and community impact.

Submissions will be scored based on five aspects—marketing objectives, creativity, quality, content and results—and the top three organizations or individuals in a category will be recognized.

Winners will be recognized at the Adrian Awards Celebration on March 4, 2027, at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas.

Find more information or submit [here](#).

Around Associations

By Todd McElwee

EIC Awards Recognizes Maritz's Elevate 2026 for Sustainability...

The Events Industry Council (EIC) has announced that Elevate 2026, an annual brand event for Maritz clients, suppliers and team members, has achieved BRONZE-level certification for the EIC's Sustainable Event Standards.

"Achieving BRONZE-level certification for Elevate 2026 demonstrates what's possible when meaningful event experiences are paired with a shared commitment to sustainability," said Jim Russell, Global Head, Business Events

Solutions at Maritz. "We're so proud of the work our teams and partners have done to make measurable progress, reduce our environmental footprint and create a positive impact in the communities where we meet."

The EIC Sustainable Event Standards were created through a global collaborative process with participation from leaders in all sectors. EIC said they provide a framework for collaboration and a strong focus on guidance and metrics, so that event professionals at all stages of their sustainability journey have support to implement and measure sustainable practices.

The standards specify performance criteria in the areas of organizational management; marketing; communications and engagement; climate action; water management; materials and circularity; supply chain management; diversity, equity and inclusion; accessibility and social impact. To date, more than 300 professionals have participated in the review of the standards. The venue standard is one of several comprehensive standards for more environmentally sustainable events.

"Maritz's certification of Elevate 2026 demonstrates how organizations can integrate sustainability into every stage of the event planning process," said Amy Calvert, President & CEO of EIC. "By achieving BRONZE-level certification, Maritz has shown an ongoing commitment to measuring its impact, engaging stakeholders and advancing responsible business event practices. We congratulate the Maritz team on this achievement and their leadership in the events industry."

Elevate 2026 was held May 11 – 14 at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess Resort in Scottsdale. Maritz's certification aligns with its mission to achieve Net Zero impact across its entire organization by 2050. More information can be found [here](#): Elevate 2026 - Community Impact

Since measuring began in 2021, Maritz has reduced its event impact, embedded sustainable standards into event design and enhanced contributions to the local communities hosting its events. Overall, they have reduced their organizational footprint by 28%.

The Alliance for Audited Media, a not-for-profit auditing organization, performed the independent third-party certification of the event's compliance with the Event Organizer standard.

"Maritz's achievement reflects its thoughtful approach to event planning that incorporates environmental and

social responsibility alongside business objectives," said Richard Murphy, CEO, President and Managing Director of the Alliance for Audited Media. "We congratulate Maritz on this achievement and its ongoing efforts to make sustainability an integral part of the event experience."

Find more information [here](#).

Metro NYSAE Welcomes New Board Officers... Kirsten Wynn, Chief Innovation & Programming Officer of the Women Presidents' Organization, became Metro NYSAE's Chair on July 1. She succeeds Colleen Harper, CAE, who transitioned to the role of Immediate Past Chair after serving as Chair for the past two years. Joining Wynn and Harper as Officers are Annette Homan, CAE, COO, RIMS, as Chair-Elect, Lili DeVita, Senior Vice President and COO, Financial Executives International, as Treasurer, and Sal Chiarelli, Executive Vice President, SIFMA, as Secretary.

Obesity Association Releases Care Information... The Obesity Association, a division of the American Diabetes Association has released the next section in the **Standards of Care in Overweight and Obesity**, "Screening, Diagnosis, Evaluation, and Staging of Obesity in Adults." It was published in **Diabetes, Obesity, and CardioMetabolic CARE** and **BMJ Open Diabetes Research & Care**.

"Obesity is not simply a matter of weight—it is a multifactorial, chronic disease requiring systematic, person-centered care. These guidelines equip clinicians with the guidance and tools to identify risk earlier, reduce underdiagnosis, and deliver precise and effective care," said Victoria Bouhairie, MD, DipABLM, DABOM, the American Diabetes Association's (ADA's) senior vice president of obesity and prevention.

Find more information [here](#).

AHLA Report Finds Americans Traveling Despite Higher Rates

By Jordan Bradley

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) says that while travel rates have increased this year, Americans are opting to adapt their vacations instead of outright cancelling them.

The association made the assertion after it released findings from a survey of American travelers, which found that 56% "still plan a summer trip despite rising costs, with travelers prioritizing hotel stays over cutting back on shopping, dining, and entertainment."

The study, released mid-July, found that travelers are booking hotels with amenities such as complimentary breakfast, and are making use of their loyalty rewards.

Polling for the survey was conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of the AHLA. Surveying more than 2,200 adults in mid-June, the report looked at what behaviors travelers were adjusting during

summer travel this year.

Amongst the findings, the report discerned that travelers are choosing to "protect the trip, but economize on shopping and dining first, with some looking to save on lodging as well," the report said.

The report also found that with higher price tags at the pump this summer, travelers are choosing less expensive destinations closer to home with a 30% shift from flying to driving, AHLA said, which "will redirect demand toward value destinations."

"Summer travel isn't slowing down. Americans are protecting and prioritizing their vacations and becoming more budget conscious," said Rosanna Maietta, president and CEO of AHLA. "Americans are stretching their dollars, traveling closer to home, taking memorable road trips, and choosing hotels offering amenities that enhance their overall experience."

Find the report [here](#).



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